



# THE WALKING DEAD

51



Cliff J08  
CLIFF

KIRKMAN • ADLARD • RATHBURN



IMAGE COMICS PRESENTS

# THE WALKING DEAD™

**ROBERT KIRKMAN**  
Creator, Writer

**RUS WOOTON**  
Letterer

**CHARLIE ADLARD**  
Penciler, Inker, Cover

**SINA GRACE**  
Editor

**CLIFF RATHBURN**  
Gray Tones, Cover Colors

## For Skybound Entertainment

**Robert Kirkman**  
chief executive officer

**Shawn Kirkham**  
director of business development

**Sydney Pennington**  
assistant to mr. kirkham

**J.J. Didde**  
president

**Tim Daniel**  
digital content manager

**Feldman Public Relations LA**  
public relations



**Sina Grace**  
editorial director

**Chad Manion**  
assistant to mr. grace

for International Rights inquiries,  
please contact [sk@skybound.com](mailto:sk@skybound.com)

[www.skybound.com](http://www.skybound.com)

## Previously:

Rick passed out, he was bedridden and in and out of consciousness for an entire day. Carl thought he was on his own--but in the end, Rick was very sick but recovering... things were finally starting to look up.

## For Image Comics



**Robert Kirkman**  
chief operating officer

**Eric Stephenson**  
publisher

**Kevin Yuen**  
digital rights coordinator

**Erik Larsen**  
chief financial officer

**Todd Martinez**  
sales & licensing coordinator

**Tyler Shainline**  
production manager

**Drew Gill**  
art director

**Todd McFarlane**  
president

**Sarah deLaine**  
pr & marketing coordinator

**Jonathan Chan**  
senior production artist

**Marc Silvestri**  
chief executive officer

**Branwyn Bigglestone**  
accounts manager

**Monica Garcia**  
production artist

**Jim Valentino**  
vice-president

**Emily Miller**  
administrative assistant

**Vincent Kukua**  
production artist

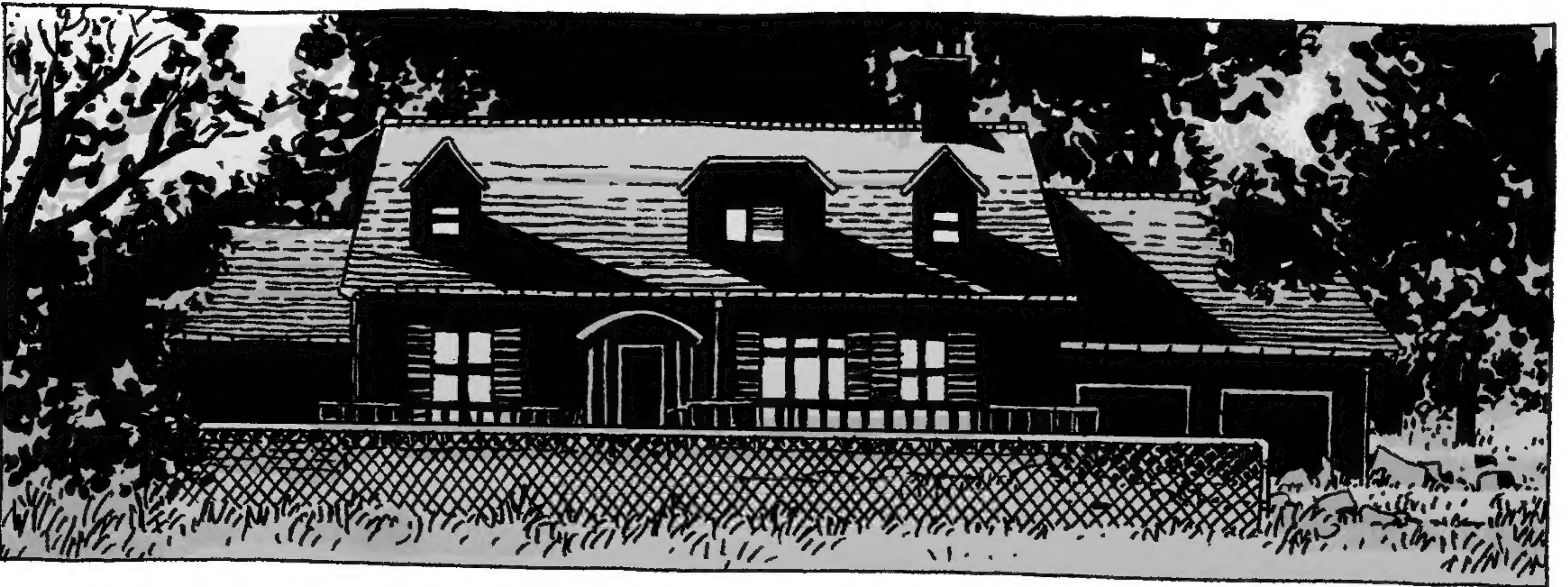
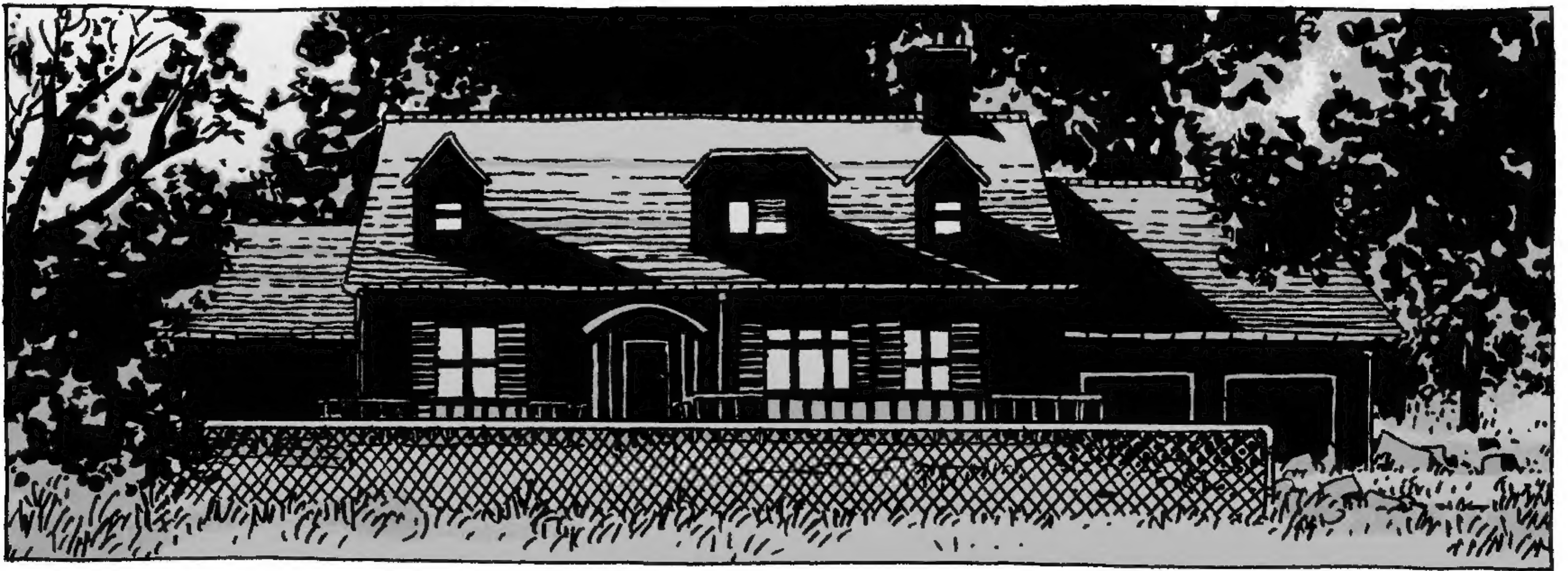
**Jana Cook**  
production artist

**Jamie Parreno**  
marketing assistant

[www.imagecomics.com](http://www.imagecomics.com)

THE WALKING DEAD WEEKLY #51. December 2011. Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 2134 Allston Way, 2nd Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704. Copyright © 2011 Robert Kirkman LLC. All rights reserved. THE WALKING DEAD® (including all prominent characters featured herein), its logo and all character likenesses are trademarks of Robert Kirkman LLC, unless otherwise noted. Image Comics® and its logos are registered trademarks and copyrights of Image Comics, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means (except for short excerpts for review purposes) without the express written permission of Image Comics, Inc. All names, characters, events and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living and/or dead), events or places, without satiric intent, is coincidental. Printed in the USA. For information regarding the CPSIA on this printed material call: 203-595-3636 and provide reference # EAST - 416366

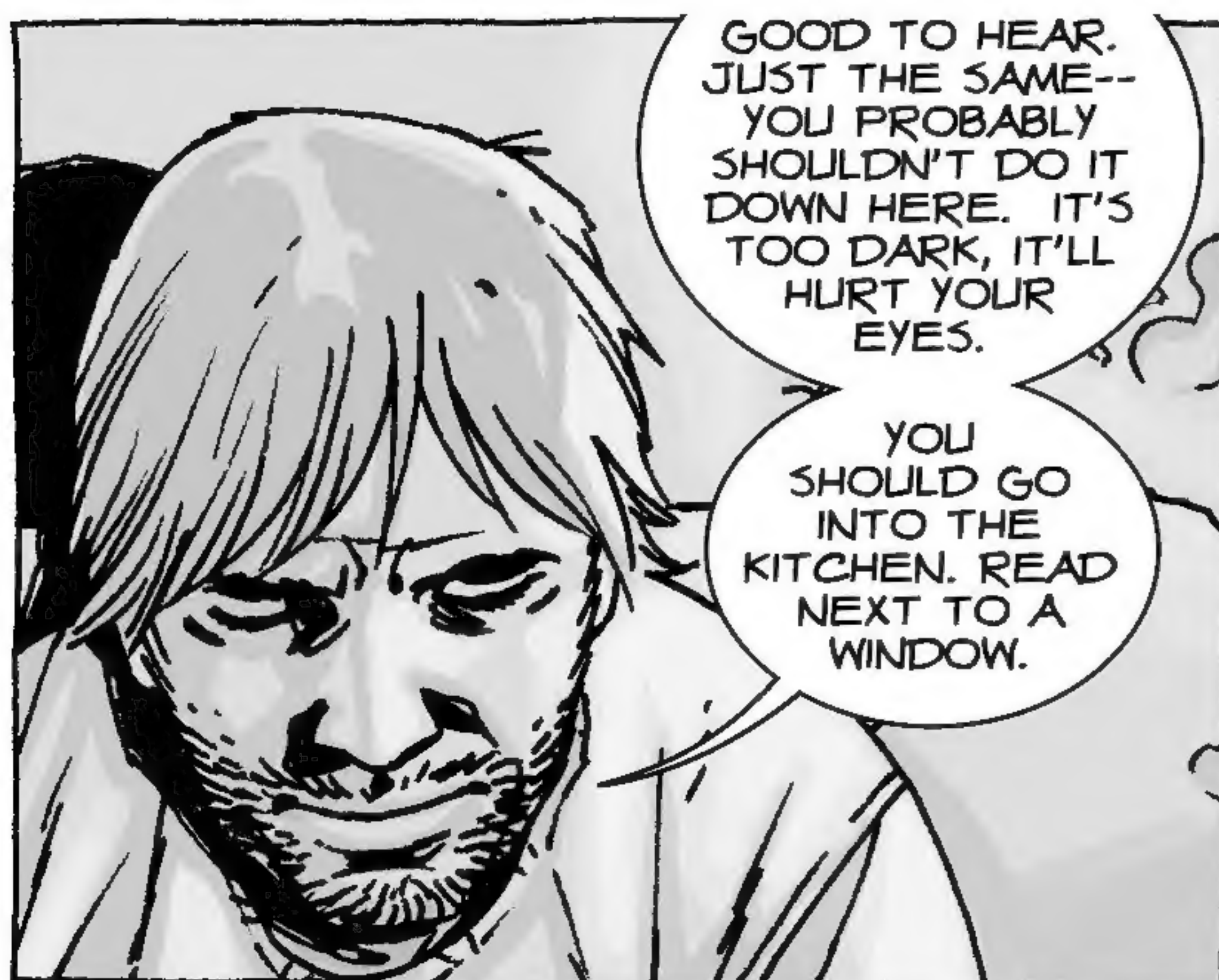














I FOUND SOME MORE ANTIBIOTICS-- SOME ASPIRIN, BAND-AIDS, ALL KINDS OF GOOD STUFF. WHAT'S IN THE KITCHEN?



NOT A LOT. SOME CANNED STUFF, CORN, CRANBERRY SAUCE... MORE GREEN BEANS. POTATO FLAKES... SOME NUTS. IT'S NOT MUCH.



WE'LL TAKE IT ALL. I'M SURE THERE'S BETTER STUFF IN THE STORE, BUT I WANT TO GATHER EVERYTHING WORTH TAKING JUST IN CASE.



TURN AROUND SO I CAN PUT THIS STUFF IN THE BACK-PACK.

WHAT ABOUT TOILET PAPER? I THINK WE'VE ONLY GOT THREE ROLLS LEFT IN THE OTHER HOUSE.



I'LL CHECK.

BINGO.



UPSTAIRS... DID YOU HEAR THAT?



IT'S NOTHING, THE HOUSE SETTLING. WE'VE CHECKED THIS PLACE TWICE. IT'S CLEAN.



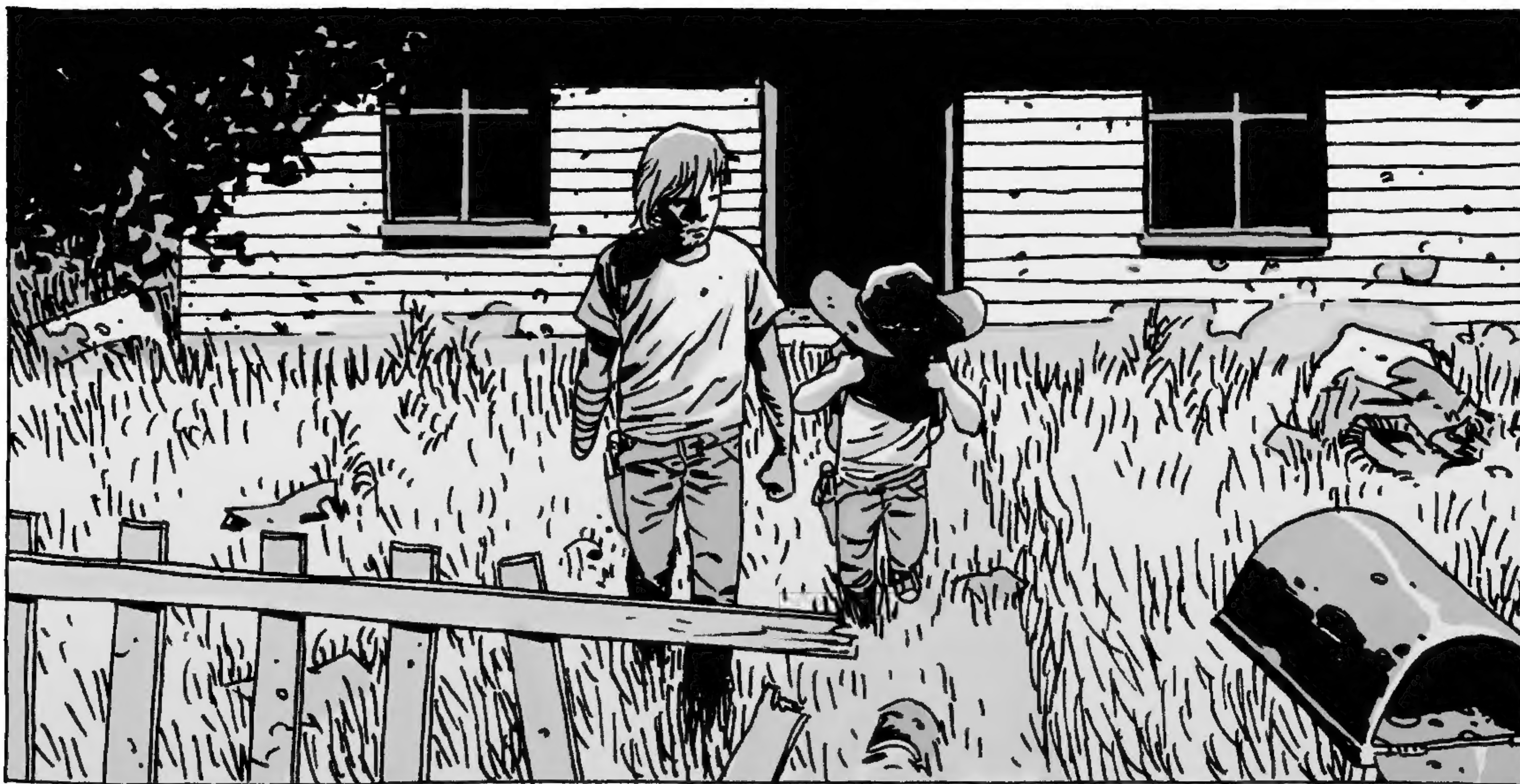
IF IT DIDN'T HAVE SO MANY BROKEN WINDOWS, WE'D BE MOVING IN.

JUST THE SAME, LET'S NOT SPEND TOO MUCH TIME IN HERE.



LET'S GET THE FOOD AND GET OUT.





















I CAN'T BELIEVE WE STILL HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING.

WITH ALL THAT TALKING? I'M NOT. WE REALLY NEED TO GET OUT HERE EARLY--CAMP IN A SPOT, WAIT FOR DEER--OR WHATEVER TO COME TO US.

I WASN'T SURE WE'D SEE ANYTHING TODAY ANYWAY, BUT IT WAS WORTH A SHOT. LET'S TRY AND GET UP EARLY TOMORROW--COME OUT HERE BEFORE THAT WOMAN CALLS BACK.

NOW KEEP QUIET--WE MIGHT SEE SOMETHING ON THE WAY BACK.

FINE.

**YEEAAGGH!**



CARL--  
**KEEP UP!**









CARL!

NO!

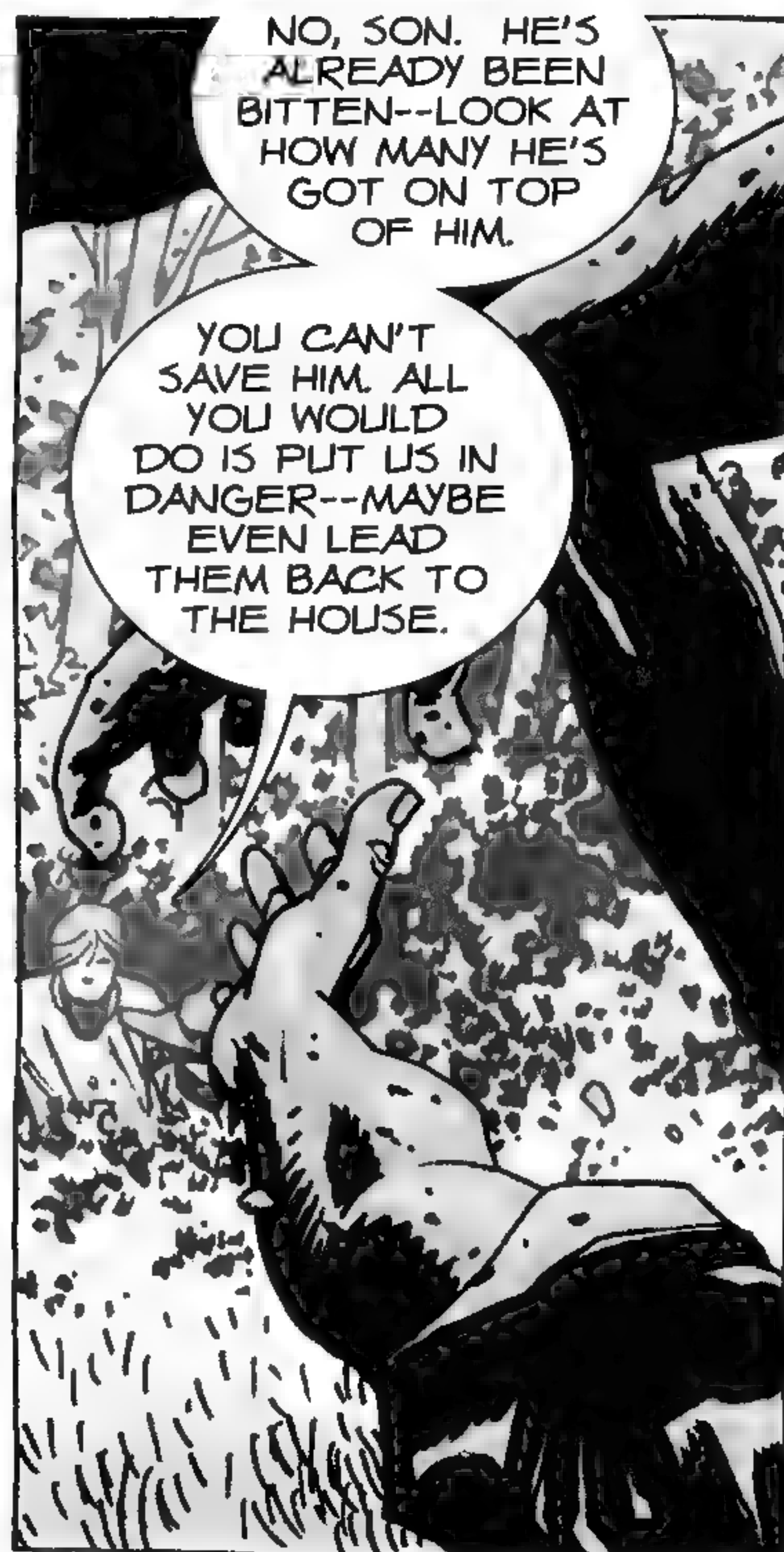


WHAT ARE YOU DOING?  
DON'T FIRE YOUR GUN.

WHAT?



DAD--  
WE'VE GOT TO SAVE HIM!



NO, SON. HE'S ALREADY BEEN BITTEN--LOOK AT HOW MANY HE'S GOT ON TOP OF HIM.

YOU CAN'T SAVE HIM. ALL YOU WOULD DO IS PUT US IN DANGER--MAYBE EVEN LEAD THEM BACK TO THE HOUSE.



YEEAA--

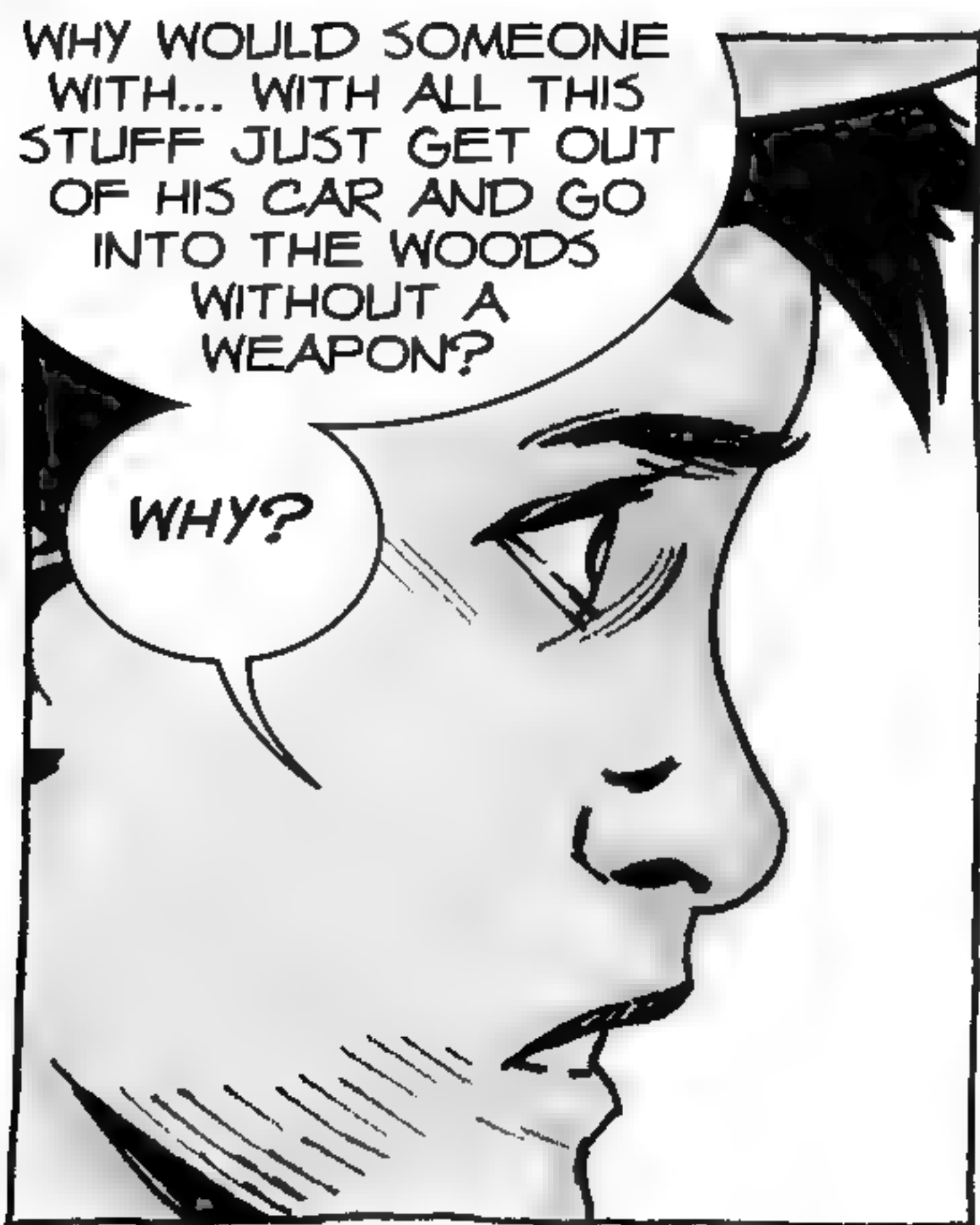
GLLGGH.



C'MON, CARL...

WE SHOULD GO.









I'M OPENING  
THE MYSTERY  
CAN. YOU WANT  
SOME OF  
WHATEVER  
IS--

SORRY, I  
DIDN'T KNOW  
YOU WERE  
TALKING.

SORRY.



IF YOU'VE GOT  
SUPPLIES YOU'RE  
WILLING TO SHARE,  
WE COULD REALLY  
USE THEM--  
THAT'S ALL I'M  
SAYING.

LISTEN, I'LL BE  
HONEST WITH YOU.  
I TRUST YOU, I  
REALLY DO. BUT  
THE OTHERS.. AND  
I HAVE TO SIDE WITH  
THEM... THEY'RE NOT  
SURE. THEY THINK  
YOU SEEM A LITTLE  
TOO EAGER TO  
FIND US.

I HOPE YOU  
UNDERSTAND. WE'VE  
LOST A LOT OF PEOPLE  
RECENTLY. EVERYONE IS  
ON EDGE--WE JUST  
NEED TO BE SURE. WE  
JUST NEED TO  
TAKE OUR TIME.



I GET THAT, I DO.  
BUT MY SON AND I  
HAVE BEEN HUNTING  
TWO DAYS IN A ROW  
NOW AND WE'VE GOT  
NOTHING TO  
SHOW FOR IT.

WE'VE GOT  
A CAR NOW--AND  
IF WE DON'T FIND  
ANYTHING TOMORROW--  
IF THINGS DON'T START  
LOOKING UP, WE MAY  
HAVE TO MOVE ON  
FROM HERE.

I'LL CALL  
AGAIN TOMORROW.  
PLEASE DON'T LEAVE  
WITHOUT TALKING TO  
ME. THERE'S A LOT  
TO CONSIDER. EVEN IF  
YOU KNEW WHERE WE  
WERE--THERE'S NO  
GUARANTEE YOU  
COULD GET  
HERE.

I COULDN'T  
LIVE WITH MYSELF IF  
YOU OR CARL DIED  
TRYING TO GET HERE.  
JUST SIT TIGHT--WE'LL  
WORK THIS OUT.





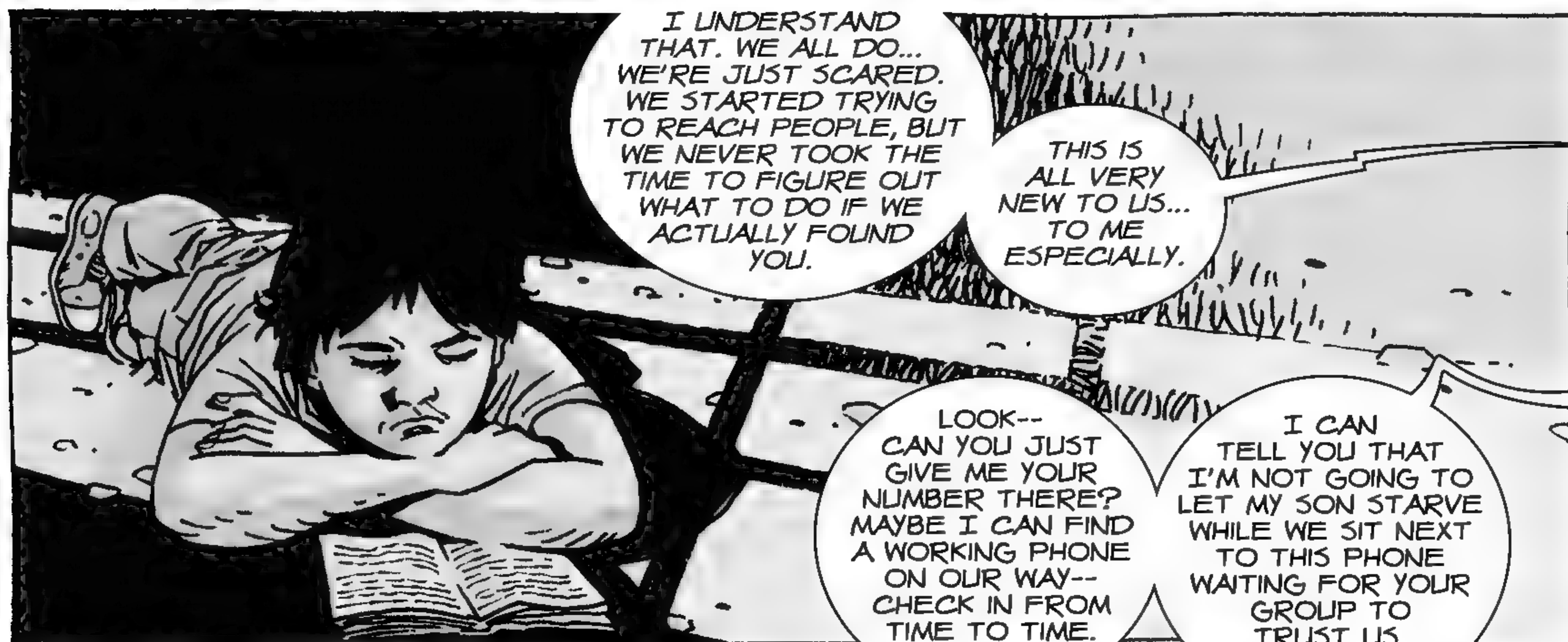




THERE'S LITTLE MORE THAN SCRAPS LEFT IN THE LITTLE GENERAL STORE NEXT DOOR. WE CAN'T FIND ANYTHING IN THE WAY OF ANIMALS WHEN WE GO OUT HUNTING.

I THINK WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO MOVE ON.

PLEASE DON'T MISTAKE MY DESPERATION FOR SINISTER MOTIVE. I UNDERSTAND THE NEED TO BE CAUTIOUS... I DON'T EXACTLY TRUST YOU PEOPLE EITHER. IT'S JUST, I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE ODDS WERE ON YOU CONTACTING ME LIKE THIS. IF WE LEAVE HERE--WE'LL NEVER SPEAK AGAIN.

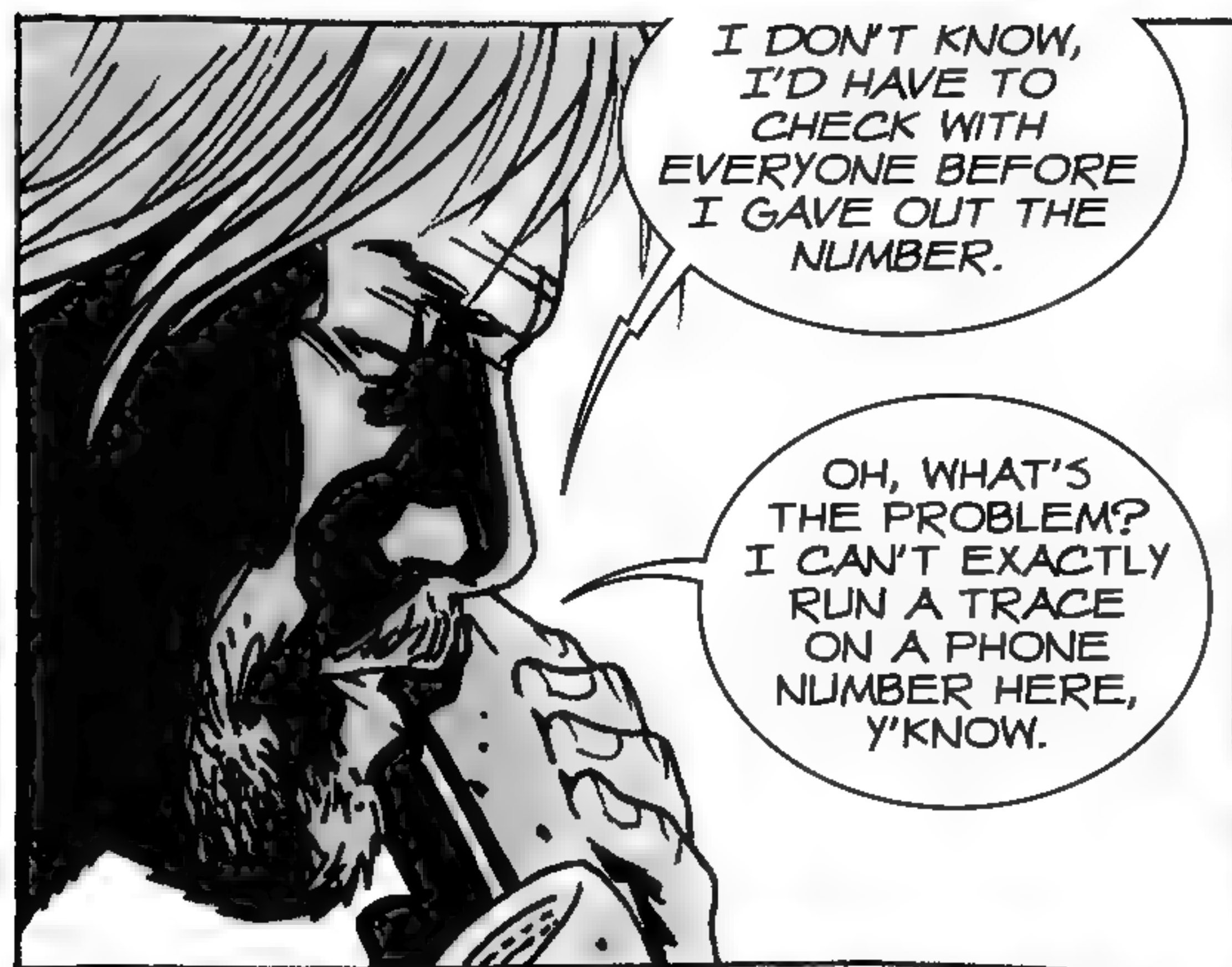


I UNDERSTAND THAT. WE ALL DO... WE'RE JUST SCARED. WE STARTED TRYING TO REACH PEOPLE, BUT WE NEVER TOOK THE TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO IF WE ACTUALLY FOUND YOU.

THIS IS ALL VERY NEW TO US... TO ME ESPECIALLY.

LOOK-- CAN YOU JUST GIVE ME YOUR NUMBER THERE? MAYBE I CAN FIND A WORKING PHONE ON OUR WAY-- CHECK IN FROM TIME TO TIME.

I CAN TELL YOU THAT I'M NOT GOING TO LET MY SON STARVE WHILE WE SIT NEXT TO THIS PHONE WAITING FOR YOUR GROUP TO TRUST US.



I DON'T KNOW, I'D HAVE TO CHECK WITH EVERYONE BEFORE I GAVE OUT THE NUMBER.

OH, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? I CAN'T EXACTLY RUN A TRACE ON A PHONE NUMBER HERE, Y'KNOW.



OKAY, OKAY... YOU'RE RIGHT. LET ME GET THE NUMBER.

NOW WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE. THANK YOU SO MUCH...



...  
Y'KNOW, IT JUST OCCURRED TO ME THAT I HAVEN'T EVEN ASKED YOU YOUR NAME.

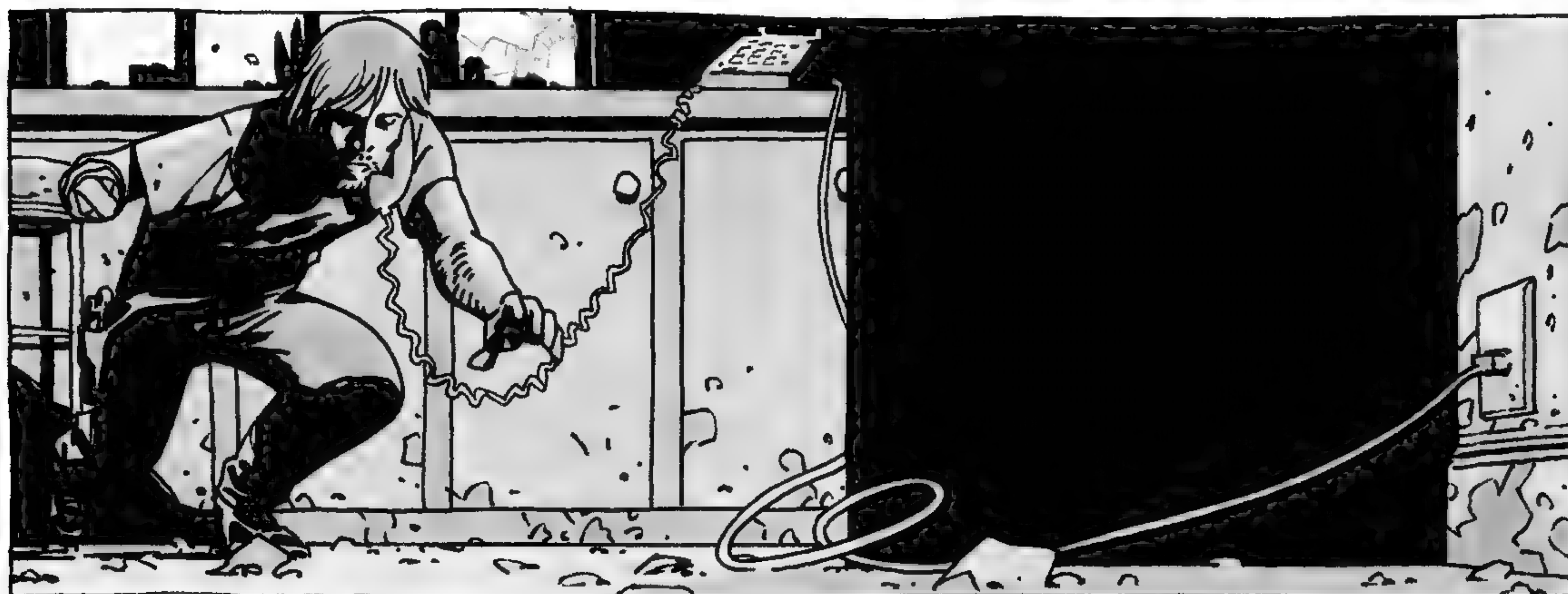




RICK...

...IT'S  
ME. IT'S  
LORI.

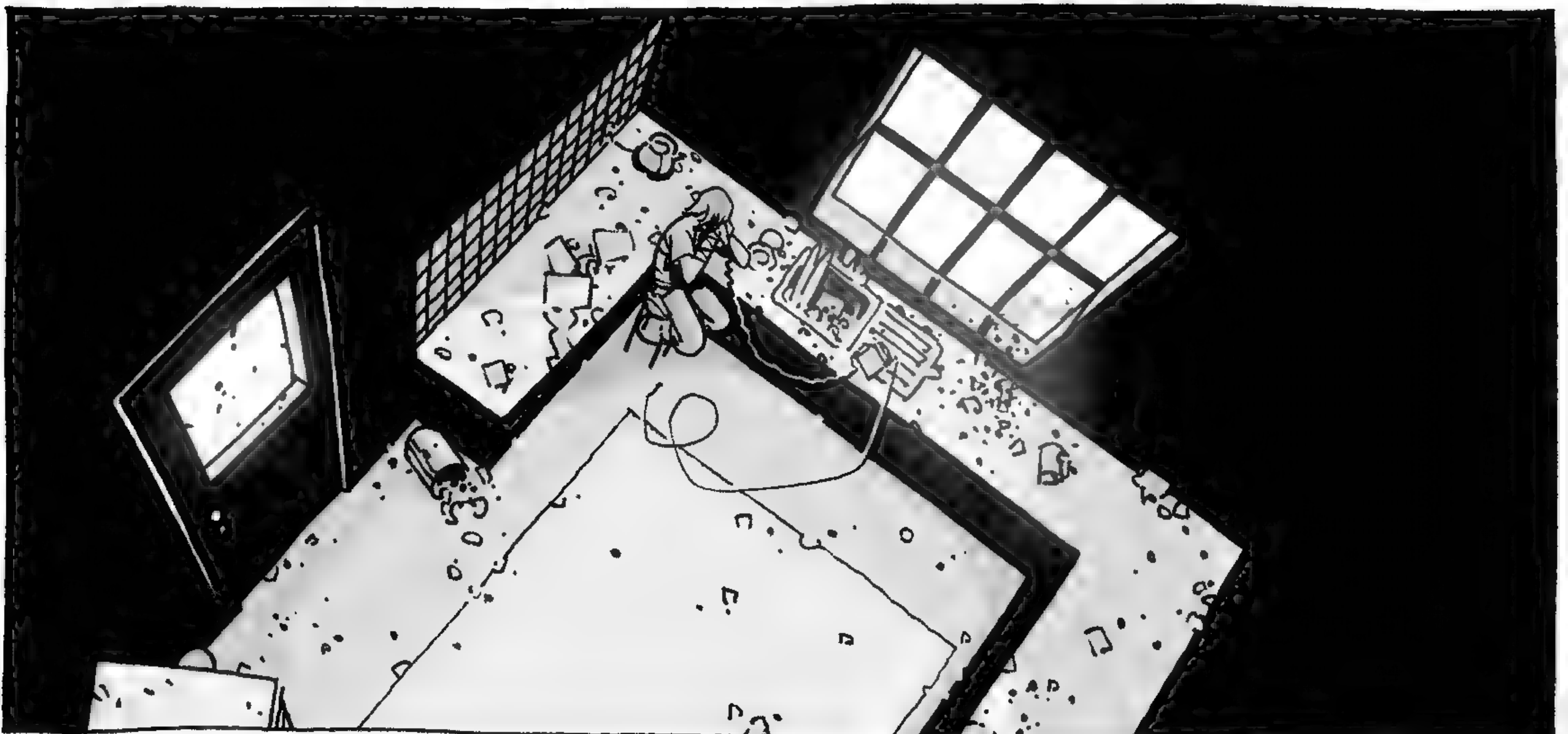








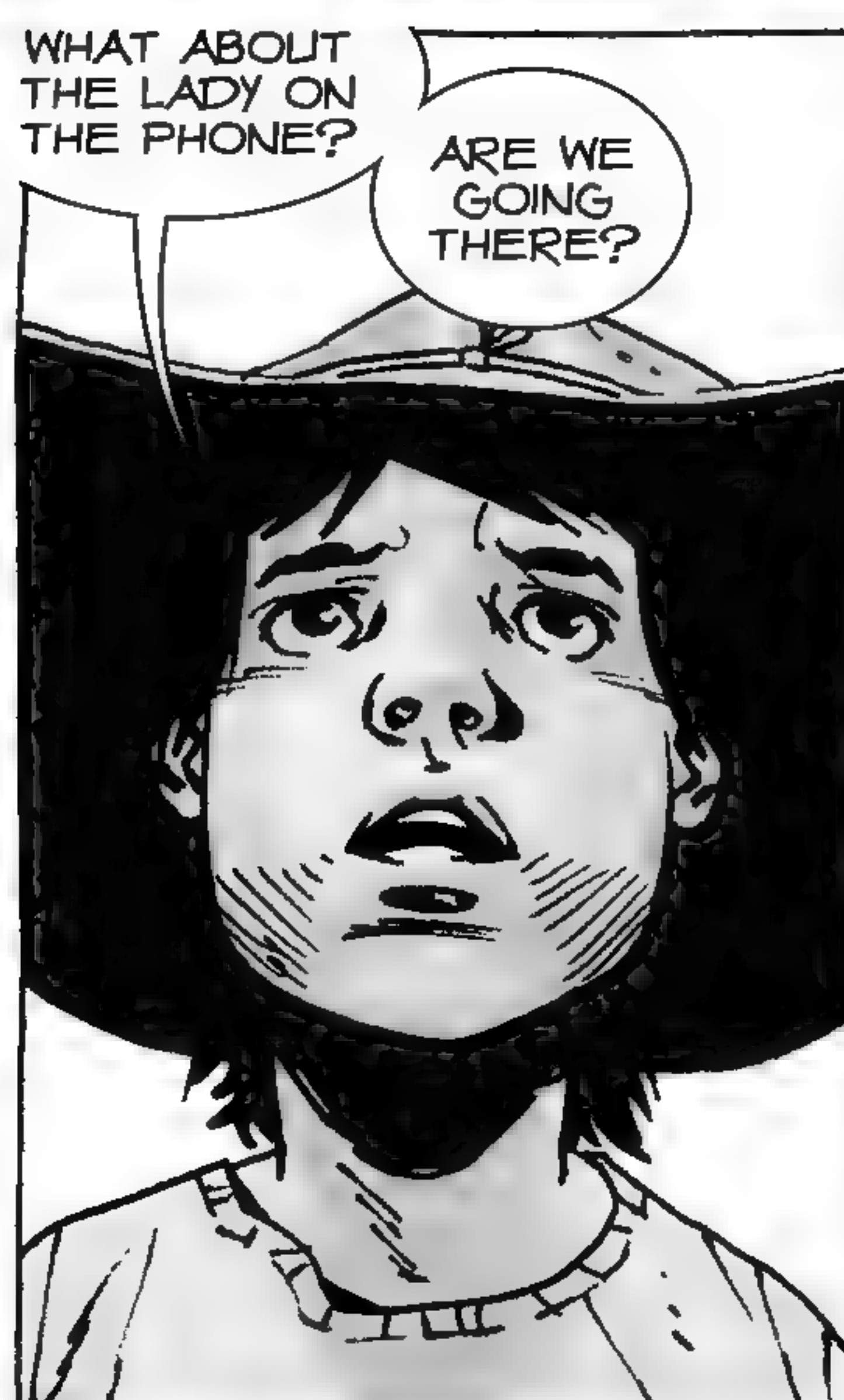




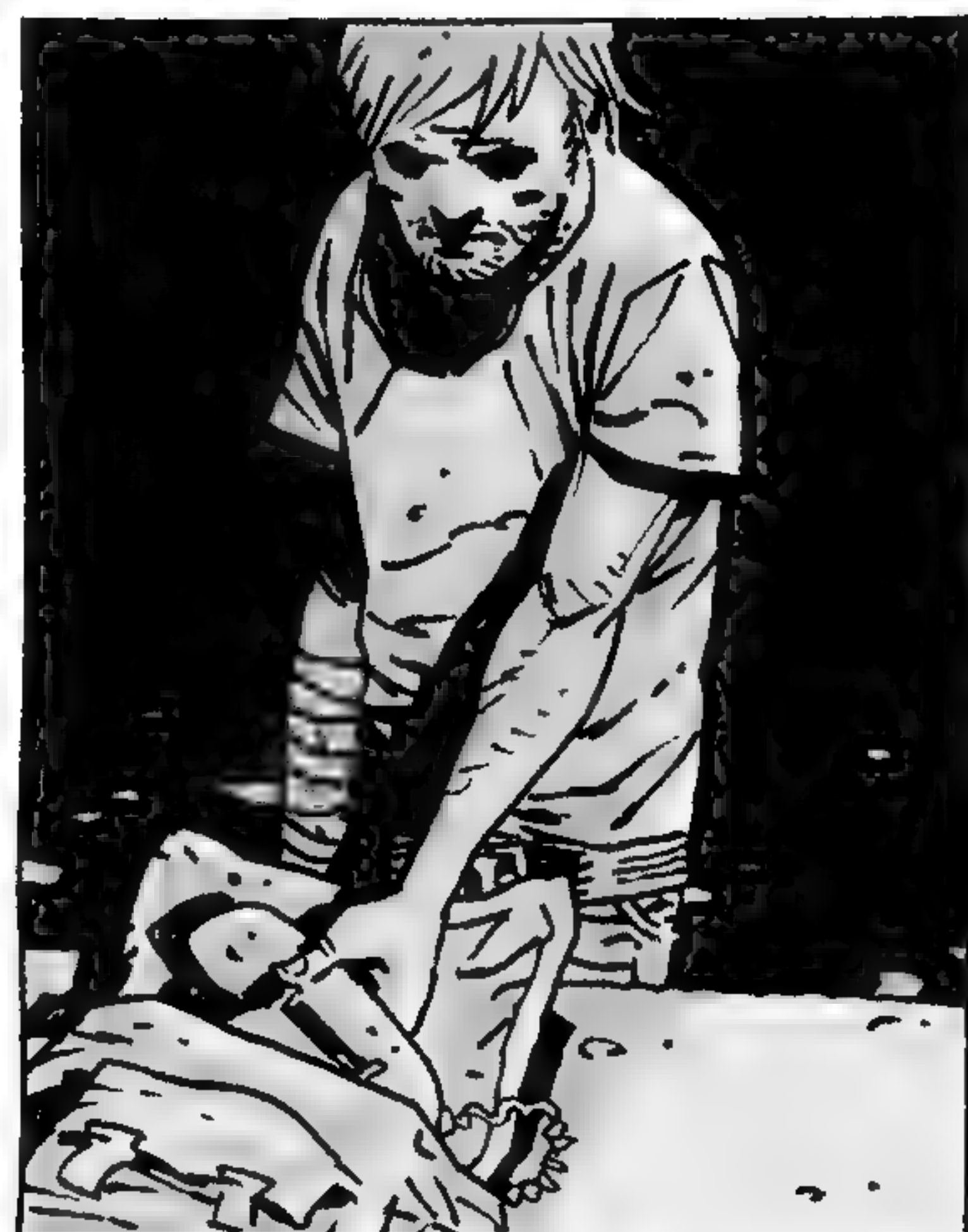














# LETTER HACKS

WRITE TO US AT:

WALKINGDEAD@FUNKOTRON.COM

Hi Readers,

**Still hot off the heels of issue 50, here's a vintage interview with Robert, Charlie, and Eric Stephenson.**

Enjoy,

Sina Grace

Okay, folks... I'm knee deep in convention season and have very little time to read and respond to mail — so I've asked and the fine folks at [www.comicbookresources.com](http://www.comicbookresources.com) have been gracious enough to allow me to run the interviews that they did with myself, Charlie Adlard, and Eric Stephenson in celebration of the release of *The Walking Dead* 50.

They were conducted by Michael Patrick Sullivan and ran on the Comic Book Resources website over at [www.comicbookresources.com](http://www.comicbookresources.com) or [www.cbr.cc](http://www.cbr.cc) if you prefer something shorter.

You should visit their site — they're way cool. Okay — here goes.

## ROBERT KIRKMAN INTERVIEW:

Robert Kirkman began his comics career by publishing his own work through the label of Funk-O-Tron. The most notable of this output was the infamous title "Battle Pope." His success there soon led Kirkman to bigger things like a four-issue "SuperPatriot" miniseries for Image Comics, which in turn led him to shutter his own publishing house and put out his own creator-owned projects through Image. In early 2003, Kirkman launched the superhero title, "Invincible," garnering both critical and popular acclaim. Kirkman then followed up on that success with something quite different, a black and white character drama set against a zombie apocalypse called "The Walking Dead," consistently the best-selling black and white title on the stands.

As "The Walking Dead" counts down to its milestone fiftieth issue, Kirkman sat down with CBR new to discuss the fan-favorite work.

"Rick Grimes is arguably the main character," Kirkman said of his "Walking Dead" cast. "He's the only character who's been in every issue so far...and he's the only character we've really focused on at all times. For the time being at least, 'The Walking Dead' is his story. He's a small town police officer whose life has been turned upside down by this zombie apocalypse business. He's got a young son, named Carl who will be taking a more active roll in the book starting with issue 50.

"There are a lot of characters for people to get to know in the book and they come and go as characters die off and new characters are encountered. This book has amassed quite a body count over its 50-issue run."

"There are aspects of different people here and there in the characters," Kirkman said of the basis for the large, though individually distinct cast, whose diversity and lifelikeness have made the book startlingly believable despite

its fantastical premise. "A lot of different characters have aspects of my personality, I think, but for the most part, I'm just making people up. Not one character is exclusively based on one person. Except for The Governor, who is exactly like Joe Quesada. They are literally exactly the same."

As readers have learned, no one is safe in "The Walking Dead." The book has seen a great many characters leave it's pages, including some popular, well-liked ones. Kirkman said, though, that it doesn't get harder to make the death toll climb, no matter who it may be. "There have been times where I've held off on killing people because I didn't think they had become established enough. It's more fun to kill the characters that I'll miss. That has more impact. I've never killed off a character just to kill someone in an issue.

"For the most part, most people die because that's what would realistically happen. I recently killed off a big chunk of characters, not to shock people or shake the book up... but because a situation had arisen in the book where it would logically, be very hard to survive."

Despite their penchant for ending up six feet under, sometimes the characters spring to life in ways that even their creator doesn't expect. Said Kirkman, "There was a point in issue #18, I believe, where right up to the last minute Lori and Rick were plotted to get into a big argument and decide to split up. That was the plan for them since the beginning of the series. I was writing the pages and I was trying to steer the dialogue to where the plot needed it to go. I'd type Rick saying something and then Lori reacting and vice versa and I just could not get them to a place where splitting up was logical. It was like I wanted two people to break up--and they started being rational and agreeable to each other right in front of my eyes... and the scene came to a close with them still together. Weird stuff."

With such a large cast and in a seemingly constant state of flux, as characters die and new ones come onto the scene, some readers wonder whether Kirkman regrets populating "The Walking Dead" with so many substantive characters.

"At times, yeah, I wish there were less characters in the book," Kirkman confessed, "but really that's the nature of this kind of book. The characters live in a very dangerous world. If there were less of them the book would be over by now. I need to inject new blood into the book from time to time. And it's fun dealing with all the different personalities and points of view. So sometimes it's frustrating but for the most part, it's exactly what makes 'The Walking Dead' the book it is."

With such challenges, "The Walking Dead" is an ambitious book that sometimes seems to make its own decisions. Said the writer, "I've had a pretty loose plan that I've followed up to this point that I had worked out before I pitched the series. I had planned for them to arrive at the prison at the end of issue #7--not issue #12. I knew Michonne [a mysterious, katana-wielding woman] was going to show up with the two zombies in leashes, but I didn't know that would be issue #19. So things changed along the way. I always planned on them getting into a battle with another well-established group of survivors, but Woodbury and The Governor specifically came to me as I wrote the series. But



the main points of the book were all in place at the start of the series. There are a few bits left that I haven't gotten to yet. I had big plans when we started this series. "

Kirkman still has big plans. "Once we hit issue #12 or so, and it was clear that we'd be around for a while, my mind just sort of exploded with possibilities. So at this point, I've got a roadmap that could take us to issue #300, assuming the readers want us around that long. Now, that doesn't mean I know what happens in the next 250 issues, that would be absurd, but I've got, like, ten or so big landmark events and getting to them and setting them up has a lot of little specific things that have to happen, so I don't know what issue things will fall in or even what order some of the things will happen in, but it's all just a matter of plugging in the events and working toward them."

While Kirkman has adopted a longer view of the series, it's not an infinite view. "I think the book is destined to end at some point," Kirkman confirmed. "Nothing lasts forever, and I don't see this as a 'Spider-Man-like' series that I would pass on to someone else at some point.

"Also, who knows... sales could tank at any moment and I'd have to end the book. It's unlikely but who knows when I'll say, 'this book is more popular than Jesus and turn the whole fan base against us.

"I really, really enjoy writing this book and all I've ever wanted out of my comics career is the opportunity to write a long issue-spanning story that I control 100%, so ending that seems foolish to me. If I ever saw that I was writing on co-pilot or not enjoying things or if readers were really hating the book, I'd do us all a favor and put a stop to it. Right now I feel like I could write this book for the rest of my life and be completely happy."

As the series has grown, so has Kirkman's storytelling. "I like to think I'm a better writer now and that I consider certain angles that I hadn't or wouldn't have back then," he said. "Who knows? I certainly don't see a significant difference in my writing but I'm sure there is. I think I'm more critical of my work now. I second-guess myself a bit more now than I used to, which is something I hate because it slows down the process a bit. I used to just lay out the ideas and keep moving, but now I examine, consider other angles, I'm doing things now that I probably should have been doing all along."

With that in mind, there is a type of story that Kirkman has yet to depict in "The Walking Dead's" pages, aside from the social, political, dramatic, comedic and horrific tales he tells from month to month. "I think it would be neat if there was a stretch of the book that was more action-oriented," the writer said, "but only if it occurred naturally. It's all about the characters at this point. I just go where they take me."

More than just Kirkman's writing has grown since the series began in 2003. "I've grown a lot as a person since I started this book," said the writer. "I'm almost 30 now, I have a son. My personal life is completely different. When I started this book I didn't have two nickels to rub together. Now I have many nickels, enough nickels. To say this series changed my life completely would not be an overstatement. My career would certainly not be where it is today without this book."

Over the last five years, "The Walking Dead" has amassed a devoted following. "It's very odd. I've talked to other creators about this, but we seek out the negative comments," the writer explained. "I'll go to a message board and skim positive messages about a given issue and then the one I read is the one that starts with 'This book sucks' or 'I quit.' We all do it, I think. It's like the negative feedback is all that matters. I print a lot of mail in 'The Walking Dead.' but a sure-fire way to get printed is to send me a critical letter. I can't do anything with 'I love this book' other than say 'thanks,' so I don't print a lot of those. I actually enjoy the little bit of negative response I get--as long as it's intelligent and not just 'This book needs more nudity and/or gore' or 'Please put out the book in color.' I could do without those."

Added Kirkman, "I think, like most creators today, there's a pretty open line of communication with the fans and myself. I'm super easy to get in touch with and I actually to respond."

Sometimes, with genre fans, there comes a point where they take ownership of the characters they love and become more

possessive of them and, in turn more critical about how they're handled by those whose actual job it is to tell the story. With "The Walking Dead" hitting fifty issues, Kirkman has seen little of this syndrome.

"Not so much, thankfully," said the writer. "I know what you're talking about though, and it's always been kind of funny to me. Everyone in comics gets so bent out of shape about characters acting 'in-character.' Now, yes, Thor would probably never rape someone and Spider-Man wouldn't rob a bank. That makes sense. But if I had Rick cut off his son's head in the next issue, that would seem way out of character, but humans--are y'know, living breathing creatures who sometimes snap, flip out--and whatever. I never show you what Rick is thinking. For all readers know, Rick has been planning on cutting Carl's head off for years. People don't always act consistently with their inner selves and people, on average, do keep a lot of emotions hidden, for whatever reason. Frankly, anyone is capable of anything, and as long as the story is told well, abrupt changes in a person's behavior is quite realistic."

With a solid fanbase and now a solid history both in sales and story, now is the time that "The Walking Dead" would be primed to move beyond it's own monthly pages. But don't hold your breath. Kirkman has earned lots of attention from Hollywood regarding his zombie epic, "but I'm not going to take a deal just to take a deal," he said.

"My creator-owned work is very close to my heart and I'm lucky enough to not really need option money to survive, so I'm waiting for the right deal to come along. I don't want to just farm this thing out. I only want to do it if it's going to result in something good. I will say we came really close once and I was very excited, but this isn't horse shoes or hand grenades, so close doesn't count."

Nor is Kirkman about to start expanding out the series into a comics empire. "I think that's the mistake books make when they become as successful as 'The Walking Dead.' If I did a second series, it would make money--yes, it would be an instant success but how long would it last? I think dividing readers focus is a short-term cash-grab and a long-term detriment to the success of the book. If readers suddenly need to buy two books to get the whole story and they have to keep track of the order things occur in and things get more complicated, it weakens the integrity of the comic. Right now if you want to read 'The Walking Dead,' all you need is issues one through whatever-issue-just-came-out. Those are collected in trade paperback and hardcover to help you along--but you only need point A to point B. You don't have to know that 'The Walking Dead: Fire Bad' issues one to six take place between issues 46 and 47. If I was only in this to make money, I'd do three 'Walking Dead' series. There'd be tons of books carrying that brand, but I'm really here to tell my story, and I recognize how lucky I am to get to do that. I'm not going to do anything to mess that up. "

While a milestone like the series' fiftieth issue inspires a lot of looking back, Kirkman's also looked toward the future, both in the book and for the book. "There's a dramatic shift in the book starting with issue 48," said Kirkman. "I actually don't like talking about what's coming up in the book at all--because we've done a good job thus far of keeping things a secret and the book doesn't seem to have to telegraph upcoming big events to sell well. So things are changing a bit, and if you've read the issue you know what I mean. I will say--the characters are out of the prison. Things are more dangerous and the book is going in new directions it hasn't gone in before. We're all very excited."

Kirkman did drop one hint. "Charlie Adlard going to be drawing more buildings very soon."

"In the real world, [there will be] more issues, more trade paperbacks and more hardcovers," Kirkman continued. "The Book Four Hardcover containing issues #37-48 will be out this year, and our second deluxe hardcover, sometimes referred to as an Omnibus, containing issues #25-48 will also be out in time for Christmas this year.

"In other news, I'm committed to getting the book out on a perfect schedule. I don't like to apologize for our schedule. We've gotten to issue 50 six months shy of five years,



so I think we're doing phenomenally well for an independent series basically because has there ever been another comic that's done that? Maybe 'Cerebus,' but what other independent book has made it to #50, let alone done it in such a short amount of time. That said, there's no reason we couldn't have reached issue #50 in month #50, so that's what I'm working toward; shipping the book even better than we have been. I do feel like we owe it to the fans and retailers who've made this possible. The least we can do is get them the book on a regular schedule."

Since "The Walking Dead" debuted, zombies have become something of a cultural meme and have seen resurgence in virtually all forms of entertainment media, and Kirkman thinks they're here to stay. "I think zombies have risen to the level of vampires and werewolves and will always be a staple of popular fiction -- with highs and lows like vampires and werewolves experience -- but I think they'll always be around in some form or another and I honestly wouldn't have it any other way."

#### CHARLIE ADLARD INTERVIEW:

Cartoonist Charlie Adlard is a comics veteran who began his career in his native Britain on titles like "White Death" with Robbie Morrison and Judge Dredd in "2000 AD." American readers first saw his shadowy style in Topps' "The X-Files" comics series in the mid-nineties and in "Astronauts in Trouble," the critically acclaimed flagship title from AiT/Planet Lar. After a several years of work-for-hire for many of the major publishers, Adlard found himself with a steady gig on a new and, as fortune would have it, hugely popular creator-owned title, "The Walking Dead," written by Robert Kirkman and published by Image Comics.

In recognition of the book's milestone fiftieth issue, CBR spoke this week with writer Robert Kirkman and now Charlie Adlard sits down with us to talk about his work on the last four years of "The Walking Dead."

For the unfamiliar, "The Walking Dead," follows an ensemble cast as they try to survive a world that has faced a zombie apocalypse. A stark black and white comic, "The Walking Dead" has captured the imaginations of readers with its socio-political undertones and a focus on realistic human drama over creeps and gore.

"It's not a zombie comic," Charlie Adlard told CBR News. "We wouldn't have lasted fifty issues if it was just a zombie comic. It's a character book and it's about the characters and how they survive in an extreme situation. It's more akin to things like, for want of a better word, 'Lost,' the TV show. It's about people surviving in an alien environment. It just so happens that 'Lost' has an island and ours is a zombie holocaust."

Adlard continued, "The general public are aware there's a sort of zombie revival going on and as soon as you say it's a zombie book, I think a lot of people actually get a little put off by that because, you know what differentiates ours from any other zombie book."

Looking back on the series and its large and mostly deceased cast of characters, Adlard of course has his favorites. "Well, Robert's killed most of them," the artist laughed. "Actually one of my favorite characters is still alive, that's Michonne, so that's cool, but I didn't realize until after issue #48 that he'd killed all the characters that I'd actually created, apart from Michonne, because all the other characters surviving to now are from the beginning of the book. I know that's not intentional at all. It's just the way it happens."

"I do have a bigger connection with Michonne because I've been with her right from the beginning. It's nice that Robert gave me just the one," Adlard laughed again. "One left over to hang on to. Hopefully she'll be back again, but there's heaps more new characters coming in. Hopefully he won't kill them off as quickly as some of the others."

Adlard tries not to get too involved with Kirkman's side of the book. "I let him do the writing and he lets me do the artwork," he said. "Occasionally, when we have a conversation on the phone, we'll start talking about what he's planning, I leave him to do what he's good at. I'm not good at that, so most of the time I think, 'you're the professional.'"

"Also, I quite like to read the scripts as they come in and be surprised like a reader is," Adlard added, "so I don't really ask that many questions. It's all right to read them and go 'oh, okay. That's cool.'"

However, being so closely involved with the book means some fore knowledge of events, but even then, surprises lurk in the script pages. Said Adlard. "I know really, really roughly what's going to be happening in the bigger arc. There, again, what he's told me three months ago has probably changed. There were a couple of deaths in issue #48 that I didn't realize he was planning, for instance. So that was as much of a surprise to me as to the readers when I read the script."

Those surprises translate into the highly emotive and fresh artwork, for which Adlard has won much praise. "It makes it fresher for me as well. If I knew every tiny detail as it was coming, I don't think I'd enjoy drawing it as much, because I'm reading it and then I'm drawing it virtually immediately which gives me that sort of excitement."

Keeping himself in the dark about the future of the storylines is just one part of what makes up Adlard's take on the zombie-ridden world of "The Walking Dead." "It's kind of interesting, my art style, because I don't have different styles, but I have different ways of drawing," the artist explained. "I don't change my style radically to suit a story, but I might change, say, equipment or something. Use something like a different sort of pen or brush for a certain story or book I'm doing. It gives it a different edge."

"With 'The Walking Dead,' I do it very quickly. The reason I did it quickly to begin with was that the first issue I had to do had to be done in two weeks. To Image and Robert's credit, they said 'It has to be done in two weeks, but please, please, please, if you can't do it in two weeks, don't worry.' I thought to myself 'No, I'll set myself a challenge. I'll do it in two weeks.' And I did kind of get it done in two weeks, so that sort of established the look."

Adlard continued, "Over the years that I've been drawing it, the quickness has worked in its favor, I think. Because it's a horror book, I think that the sort of sketchier approach that I use for it is more edgy, more angular. It's not so refined, giving it that slicker, more super-heroic look, perhaps. Because it's scratchier, it gives it that grit that more associated with harder-edged sort of stuff. So it's not just me thinking 'I've got to get the book done. Get it quickly. Get it out.' It's something that works with it."

In discussing the origins of the quick-style Adlard employs, he thought back to how he got the "Walking Dead" gig in the first place. "I knew Robert very, very vaguely," he said. "I did a book with Joe Casey, called 'Codeflesh,' for Image. The last three issues weren't actually done by Image, they were done by Robert when he was doing Funk-O-Tron [Kirkman's now-defunct publishing house], publishing 'Battle Pope.' He really liked the series and offered to publish the last three episodes. So he put them out and after that I didn't really hear from him at all until one day, I got an email out of the blue. The email actually started off with 'Do you want to earn money?'

"Obviously he knew that 'The Walking Dead' already was doing well enough to guarantee a certain amount of money. That was sort of his 'in' with me. Luckily, he just got me when I was in, shall we say a 'low period' and looking for work. I had something on the go, but it really wasn't anything to shout from the rooftops. So, in many ways 'The Walking Dead' came along and saved me from going down another road that would have been a lot less profitable."

Charlie Adlard's involvement with the book has done a lot more for him than put money in his pocket. "I've got a lot to thank 'The Walking Dead' and Robert for in the end," said Adlard. "I wouldn't have dreamt in a million years how well this has book has done financially, professionally and creatively for me. On a professional level it's changed the way I see how I do things in the industry. Before 'The Walking Dead' I wouldn't have touched a creator-owned book with a barge pole. Primarily because I'm the artist, it takes longer to draw it than it does to write it, I have a wife and two kids, I have to support them, it's just not logical to go down that road the way the industry is at the moment."

"The only creator-owned in this industry worldwide, though



I don't know about Japan, are European books. In most European books they give you a page rate, but in the United States and Britain, with a creator-owned book, you're taking the big risk. You're doing it for nothing. If it's successful, great. You reap the rewards. If it's not, you've basically just done X number of pages for free. Sure, you've fulfilled yourself creatively, but time-wise, you're exhausted and you're poor at the end of it. Doing 'The Walking Dead' has completely changed my outlook on that.

"Also, I'm lucky because I have spare time to do projects I want to do as opposed to doing it because somebody's offering me money for it. I did another project for [AiT/Planet Lar] with Joe Casey called 'Rock Bottom' which was basically, you know..." Adlard laughed. "I haven't received nickel spent for that book. I just wanted to draw it because it was so good. I'm doing a European book now and I've spent two days doing a page where, with 'The Walking Dead' I spend three hours. It's not financially viable to do it for me, but I'm able to do it because of 'The Walking Dead.' It's a fantastic position to be in.

Fans of Adlard's work on "The Walking Dead" have no cause to fear that Adlard's "better position in the industry" will lead him to seek greener pastures. He has not desire to mess with a winning formula. "I've been on 'The Walking Dead' for four years now. 'The X-Files' was only two. I see no light at the end of the tunnel in terms of me leaving the book. I can see another four, five, ten years."

Adlard remarked that he never thought he'd be able to say something like that. Because of 'The Walking Dead,' the artist said, "I can see my career further ahead of me than I ever have before."

**ERIC STEPHENSON INTERVIEW:**

As Executive Director of Image Comics, Eric Stephenson has seen a great many properties come through the fold of the San Francisco publisher. Some titles flourish, others disappear almost as rapidly as they arrived. Occasionally, one strikes a chord with readers and can be classified a legitimate phenomenon.

One such comic book is "The Walking Dead," the best-selling black-and-white zombie epic written by Robert Kirkman and illustrated by Charlie Adlard. In anticipation of the series' landmark fiftieth issue, CBR News has over the past few days spoken with Kirkman and Adlard, previewed pages from the hotly anticipated issue, and we're joined now by Eric Stephenson to look back on the series beginnings and to talk about what the book means to Image today.

Kirkman was hardly an unknown quantity to Stephenson when the writer came to Image with his idea for a zombie drama. "By the time Robert started talking to us about 'The Walking Dead,' he'd done his first 'SuperPatriot' miniseries and we were pretty far along on 'Invincible,'" Eric Stephenson told CBR News. "I don't remember if he pitched 'Tech Jacket' or 'The Walking Dead' first, but he definitely wanted to do more work at Image, and he was really excited about doing a zombie book. Part of that was down to his enthusiasm for zombie flicks, but he was also interested in doing something other than superheroes."

Stephenson recalled, however, that Kirkman's pitch was met with some concern. "We liked it, but I know Jim Valentino [then-Publisher of Image Comics] did feel it needed to be something more than 'just a zombie book.' Zombie comics weren't really a sure thing at that point, and I think Jim felt there needed to be more of a hook than 'Hey, zombies!' Robert and I wound up discussing the book quite a bit after Jim had voiced his reservations, and my position was that it looked and read well, but that Jim wanted to know would make 'The Walking Dead' stand out from other zombie titles.

"Robert told me that there were going to be some other elements to the story," Stephenson continued, "some sci-fi oriented stuff that would set the whole concept apart from other zombie titles. I think the idea was that the planet was being prepared for an alien invasion or something like that. Whatever it was, I passed that on to Valentino and he seemed to think that sounded different and interesting enough to give the title a green light. A little later, probably around issue six, I asked Robert what was going on with the alien invasion, because it didn't seem like he was setting that up at all.

Robert laughed and said that was never going to happen, that he'd just pulled that out of thin air in an effort to convince us the book was going to be different."

Early on, Stephenson realized the "The Walking Dead" was a bonafide hit. The numbers told the story. "The first issue sold out right away, and then the second one did, too. Reorders were very strong right from the beginning and sales started trending upwards with issue three. There was the standard drop with issue two, but then it went right back up with three and kept climbing from there."

Image moved quickly to support it's new breakout title and sustain its heat. "Early on, we supported the book with things like free copies to retailers and overships," said Stephenson, "but I think the most important thing we did was rush out that first trade and make sure it came out alongside issue seven. We've worked very closely with Robert to make sure 'The Walking Dead' is always in print, in as many different formats as possible and I think that's helped immeasurably in terms of expanding the book's audience, both within the direct market and beyond."

Conversely, "The Walking Dead" has also served Image in return. Asked if "The Walking Dead's" high profile has helped Image as a whole, Stephenson responded, "In some cases, sure. We have a pretty diverse line of books, though, so not everyone who enjoys 'The Walking Dead' is going to be interested in the full line. Some horror fans or zombie fans just aren't into superheroes or fantasy or sci-fi or whatever. 'The Walking Dead' probably brings more eyes to our books, but it really depends on the tastes of the individual readers as to whether or not they're going to branch out from there."

"It's certainly put the lie to that old myth that Image only publishes a certain type of superhero comic," Stephenson added.

In an industry that seemingly became infatuated with the zombie genre, "The Walking Dead" survived this invasion of the undead, as its fiftieth issue can attest. Stephenson has his belief on what has set the book apart from and caused it to rise above from the rest of the zombie books that have been published in the last several years. "I think the appeal of the book is the characters," he said. "It's not just a zombie book. At 50 issues, I can't imagine anyone's buying the book just to look at more decaying flesh."

It's a view Stephenson confirms with his favorite moment from the series thus far. "Issue six was an early favorite of mine, I thought the scene at the end of the issue, with Carl and Shane, was really well done," he said, referring to when the ostensible lead of the series, Rick, confronts his partner Shane while hunting. Shane preferred it when Rick was thought to be dead, and even had an affair with Rick's wife, Lori. Shane attempted to get that status quo back by killing Rick, but Rick's son Carl defends his father by shooting Shane in the throat. Afterward, he cried, "It isn't like killing the dead ones." Rick assured him that "it never should be."

"I'm not a big zombie fan myself," Stephenson confessed, "but the characters definitely caught my interest right from the beginning. Issue six, and that scene in particular, was kind of the point where I really got sucked in, though."

Beyond the fiftieth issue, Image will continue to support "The Walking Dead" with trade paperbacks and hardcover omnibus editions. Stephenson says there are further things in the offing. "We have other things planned, definitely, and I do think there are opportunities yet to be taken advantage of by the title. Robert and I were talking about this recently, and I think we've only begun to explore all the publishing options for this book."

-----

**Okay — next issue we'll get back into the normal letter answering business — I'll see you then!**

**-Robert Kirkman**





EMPIRE